

INVESTIGATING PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON
MEDIA OUTLETS AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE MASTER OF ARTS

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JUNE 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In loving memory of Christopher J. Sipocz.

I am indebted to Dr. Dustin Supa for his support, guidance, insight the last two years, and advising this thesis. Without your assistance none of this could be possible, including my opportunity to continue my education with a doctoral program.

I also owe my deepest gratitude to Dr. Becky McDonald and Dr. Gerry Lanosga for serving on my committee. All your feedback, encouragement, and knowledge has been tremendously helpful and appreciated.

Words cannot express my sincerest thanks to those who helped me through the final semester.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	PAGE 1
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	PAGE 5
METHODOLOGY.....	PAGE 26
RESULTS.....	PAGE 28
DISCUSSION.....	PAGE 41
CONCLUSION.....	PAGE 48
REFERENCES.....	PAGE 53
APPENDIX A: SURVEY	

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION
INVESTIGATING PERCEPTIONS AND THEIR EFFECTS
ON MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Audience perception of media outlets and news sources is critical to success of the media industry. The importance of public perceptions is often underscored by the phrase *perception is reality*. While much research has investigated media bias (Dalton 1998, Domke 1999, Eveland 2003 et al), audience perceptions (Christie 2006, Choi 2006 Coe 2008 & et al), credibility (Gunther 1986, Cook 2001, Golan 2010, et al) and news consumption (Bagdasarov 2010, Burgoon 1983, Eveland 2000, Gerber 2010, et al) a gap in research concerning such complex, multidimensional concepts remains. Additional research will help to close a gap in knowledge about the relationship and dynamics among news elements, media outlets, the public, public perception and news consumption.

Many have investigated media effects, the potential causes such as level of engagement, perspective, and emotional involvement (Gunther 1986, 1992, 2006, Hofstetter 1978, McCombs and Shaw 1972, Stalder 2009 et al). Many investigations since have relied upon national data provided by the PEW Research Center for the People and the Press rather than gathering their own data. With that in mind, this

study collected original data to explore perceptions and their effects on news consumption on a hyper local scope.

Rationale

Hyper local news, as defined by the American Journalism Review, is news dedicated to the stories of a specific demographic within a certain geographic region (AJR). This study examined perceptions of media as well as news consumption habits of undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university. This was to focus on consumption preferences and perceptions of a certain demographic on a hyper local level. The use of a hyper local scale was intended to include a collegiate news source in addition to sources that surrounded the students of the university.

A variety of lenses have been used in the past to better understand underlying relationships between media and the audience. Hostile media effect is a central theory in this study. Gatekeeping and bias were considered in ancillary roles. They were included in the literature review to give a complete review of media effects that may play a role in perceptions and media effects.

This study found perception of credibility, accuracy, and trustworthiness all played important roles in media consumption. In addition, the Internet was the most popular way for the undergraduate student population to get their news. A majority of respondents perceived television and Internet sources having a liberal

bias. Respondents perceived radio and newspapers as having a conservative bias. Evidence from this study supported opposing views on hostile media effect as respondents indicated they preferred to get their news in multiple perspectives, rather than just one. This finding raises questions to consider in the future regarding the fragmentation of the media environment and young audiences.

Popular Perception

Popular perception claims there is a liberal media bias (Goldberg 2002 and Domke 1999). Rupert Murdoch, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Fox News Corporation, felt strongly enough that he was compelled to create a media source that would provide news from the opposite perspective (McKnight 2010). Bias is the representation of one side of a story or issue and only that one side.

Popular perception is that bias comes from a news source or journalist, but that isn't always the case. Bias can exist in the audience consuming news.

Bias could result from an absence of balance resulting in one side of a story receiving unwarranted attention. It could be ideological, where owners, editors, or journalists present stories that support particular world views. Bias could also be partisan, where owners, editors, and journalists present stories to support the policies or causes espoused by political parties or interest groups. Bias could also be due to the fabrication of information, as in the cases of Linda Cooke (*Washington Post*), Jack Kelley (*USA Today*), and Jayson Blair (*The New York Times*). Bias could also come from information hidden or distorted by sources, journalists eager for a scoop as in the case of Dan Rather and President Bush's national guard records, or from career incentives of journalists who compete to be published or be on the air (Baron 4 2006).

The examples of fabrication by Cooke, Kelly, and Blair serve as evidence supporting the popular perception that bias comes from the supply side of news. Some don't think this perception is a problem for audiences, however. "Despite the belief that the news media is biased, the public does not view that bias as a major hindrance to using the news" (Baron 7 2006).

The perception of bias can affect the perception of credibility in news sources from the public (Kioussis 2001). It is, however, up to the public to decide their reaction to bias and how it affects their perception of credibility of a news outlet.

A 2001 study provided insight into the credibility of different mediums. Newspapers were believed to have the highest level of credibility (Kioussis 2001). Internet news ranked second and television news in third (Kioussis 2001).

Newspapers have long been viewed as credible. In 1986 a study indicated that newspapers scored high in credibility (Gaziano and McGrath 1986). Audiences chose to get news from television sources, however (Gaziano and McGrath 1986). The addition of the Internet and cable news has given the audience more power in selecting how, when, and in what perspective they get news (Gerber 2010, Ostertag 2010).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The media environment has changed dramatically in the last 20 years. The advent of the Internet, cable television, and social media has led to the evolution of the media. This literature review will summarize the progression of this evolution in addition to multiple facets of media research.

Topics included in this literature review will be media credibility, media consumption, uses and gratifications theory, audience trust in media, audience perception, media bias, hostile media effect, the fragmentation of the mass media, gatekeeping, and framing. All of these are critical areas of media research though some play an ancillary role in this study.

Credibility

Media serves as a window for the public to catch glimpses of what is going on in the world. The media are an important link connecting journalists,

politicians, advocates, advertisers, public relations professionals, and audiences to each other (Wanta and Hu, Golan 2010). Each party plays different roles in attempting to inform, influence, or convince each other of something—usually a perspective (Wanta and Hu 1994, Golan 2010). Success of these endeavors relies on the public’s perception of media credibility (Wanta and Hu 1994, Golan 2010).

Perception — what the public sees — may be something entirely different from what is actually being presented (Vallone 1985, Goldberg 2002, Gunther 2006, et al). The difference in perceptions and what is being presented can affect media outlets’ credibility.

The credibility of a news organization, source, or journalist plays a significant role in the public’s perceptions. “Credibility is of practical interest to journalists and news institutions because of the widespread belief that audiences are more likely to read, watch, or listen to news content provided by sources they trust” (Thorson 2010, 292). An imperative component to establishing credibility is accuracy. This doesn’t just fall on reporters, but editors and everyone working for a media outlet. Tom Rosentiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, said that getting it right “is what separates journalism from other modes of communication” (Price 2010, 823). Getting things right isn’t the only thing that matters, however. How news is presented to the public matters and can determine if the message resonates with the audience. If it does, it can establish credibility with the public.

The meanings people hold of different news outlets, or news-meanings, serve as indicators; they hint at how consumers should

orient their engagement with the news media in both cognitive and physical ways as they go about establishing confidence in what they know of the news-world (Ostertag 2010, 597).

The public seeking out news, displaying engagement or interest in doing so, allows an opportunity for media outlets to establish credibility (Cook 2001, Eveland 2000, Gunther 1986, et al).

Wanta and Hu (1994) proposed a model that high credibility perception in a media outlet leads to reliance on that medium for news; in turn reliance on that medium increases public exposure to that particular medium. In this model, audiences that consume news from specific source would increase while the consumption of news from others would decrease. These fluctuations would depend upon the perception of credibility of each news source.

Public evaluations of news credibility can be influenced by the context in which a story is presented and received by the audience (Thorson 2010).

Consequently, the context of stories becomes critical in how a media outlet is perceived. Complicating matters, researchers have considered media credibility a multidimensional construct that can be measured in different ways. The result of the differences is inconsistencies in media credibility evaluations (Choi 2006).

Consumption and Credibility

In the last couple decades the media has evolved at an accelerated pace.

Technological advancements altered the media environment with the evolution of cable news and the Internet. Cable news and the Internet created a non-stop 24-hour news cycle and making access to information easier. The new competition for print and network television news effected consumption and credibility. A 2000 survey revealed only a third of American respondents generally believed most information seen on the three traditional news networks: ABC, NBC and CBS (Pew 2000).

The technological revolution has also made a significant impact on how news is disseminated and what mediums (Internet, television, print, or radio) the public uses to get news (Bissell 2000, Christie 2006, Katz 1974, Ostgaard 1965 et al). The Internet has developed into a valuable tool for media outlets to disseminate news and a popular source used by the public (Bissell 2000). Despite the changes to the media environment, providing balanced coverage and credible content remains critical to the success of a media outlet. "To fully satisfy its constituents, a newspaper needs to provide frequent and balanced coverage" (Burgoon 1983, 82).

Trust in Media

A lack of credibility in the public's eye is nothing new to media outlets. For years research has shown a genuine distrust by the public. A 1984 study revealed less than half of respondents refused to describe television and newspaper news

outlets as either fair or accurate (Gunther and Lasorsa 1986).

There have been multiple high-profile cases which hurt public trust in the media. Jayson Blair and Steven Glass are just two examples of this. Blair resigned from *The New York Times* in 2003 after fabricating stories and plagiarizing from other newspapers and journalist's stories (Kershner 2003). Glass was fired from *The New Republic* for fabricating stories. Many more examples of such breaches of trust and journalistic credibility can be found throughout history. Blair and Glass were just two of the most recent and high profile instances.

A possible contribution to this problem is that journalism is heavily based in subjective matters. "Journalism as interpretive practice can be viewed as supplementing or, perhaps, even bridging, other perspectives on the press as a social institution...journalism makes truth claims that are read as such and evaluated as such" (Peterson 2001, 201). Humans process things differently and have different perspectives. As a result, different meanings can be construed from the same statement. This can lead to misunderstandings and disseminating inaccurate or incorrect information.

Despite this history of distrust in the traditional media — newspapers and television — some researchers credit the Internet for a slow, continual disintegration of trust and credibility in the public's eye (Christie 2006). Distrust of traditional news organizations explains, to some degree, why millions of consumers are turning to the Internet for news (Christie 2006).

There could be more significant effects for the entire media industry in store if all confidence in the media is lost. “Decreased public trust also can lead to diminish freedom of the press and can threaten the economic health of some media” (Graziano 267 1985).

Lack of trust in the media was not always so low. The General Social Survey (GSS) studied the public’s confidence in a variety of societal institutions in 1973. Confidence in the media was similar to most other institutions. Since the early 1990s, however, the media has consistently been one of the most disliked institutions in the GSS confidence battery (Cook and Gronke 2001).

A 2010 study found certain personality traits and their relation to news sources play a role in news consumption (Gerber 2010). For decades researchers have performed extensive research to better understand the relationship between media outlets and the public (Kiousis 2001, Vallone, Ross and Lepper 1985, White 1950 et al). This research has led to the development of numerous theories and models on a variety of topics such as credibility, bias, gatekeeping, framing, and hostile media effect, sometimes known as hostile media phenomenon.

Media Bias and Hostile Media Effect

Most commonly there are claims of a liberal media bias (Domke 1999). Journalism, fundamentally, is supposed to be neutral or balanced. This means that

the media outlet equally represents both sides of the story. The Society of Professional Journalists broadly defines the role of journalists in its preamble to their code of ethics.

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility (SPJ.org)

In 1996, Republican Presidential candidate Bob Dole ran against Democratic incumbent President Bill Clinton. The Dole campaign could not overcome Clinton's lead. A Freedom Forum and Roper Center Poll that found 89 percent of journalists had voted for Clinton in 1992. Dole's representatives built a case of liberal media bias against Dole based on this poll (Domke 1999).

The Dole example could also serve as an instance of hostile media effect. Hostile media effect is often best displayed when different political, religious, and racial groups, see media coverage of an issue as unfair. At the same time, they see the opposition's perspective as receiving media coverage that is too favorable (Gunther 1992). From hostile media effect, researchers learned individuals place more importance on issues they care about. (Gunther and Lasorsa 1986). Trust in sources grows when sources cover issues people care about.

A 2011 study shed new light on hostile media effect and how emotions play

into news consumption. "...[T]he effect of perceptions of bias on subsequent news preferences is somewhat impacted by the degree of anger experienced in response to a 'biased' story" (Arpan 15 2011). This study indicated emotions such as anger could lead to increased interest and consumption in news regardless of support or opposition to the person's perspective (Arpan 2011).

Previous to this finding had indicated if an individual perceived a source or media outlet as hostile, they would not continue to use that outlet as a source (Dalton, Beck & Huckfeldt 1998). An example exists in the divide in perspective between Democrats and Republicans. Democrats and Republicans see media coverage as unfavorable in opposite directions regardless of the coverage reflecting bias or reality (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt 1998).

This division between Republicans and Democrat perspectives has continued to grow. A Pew Research Center for the People and Press study in 2004 revealed that people who identify themselves as Republicans trust fewer news sources than those who identify themselves as Democrats (Pew 2004). The same study also claimed those who identified themselves as Republicans turned to more conservative news programming and outlets in increasing numbers as opposed to their counterparts (Pew 2004).

Content of messages has also been a part of hostile media effect research. A 2006 study reinforced that messages associated with large audiences are more likely to create a split between people in perception of bias (Gunther and Liebhart

2006). Similarly, messages with a smaller reach in audience number have less effect in producing a contrast in bias perceptions (Gunther and Liebhart 2006). It is felt more research is needed to learn about the mechanisms or qualities that produce a hostile media effect among audiences (Gunther and Liebhart 2006).

A 2009 study revealed conservative-minded respondents showed a strong hostile media effect while liberal-minded respondents showed no hostile media effect. This result was consistent with previous studies (Stalder 2009). This is thought to reinforce the perception of a liberal media bias, particularly for the conservative-minded respondents. At the same time, liberal-minded respondents saw the media coverage as reflecting reality (Stalder 2009). The study also found stronger reactions by the conservative-minded respondents, when based on hearsay and not observation (Stalder 2009).

Persuasive Press Inference and Projection

Persuasive press inference could also play into hostile media effect. In hostile media effect, both sides see coverage as negative. Persuasive press inference focuses on individuals' interpretation of media coverage to form a perception of public opinion (Gunther 1998). Similar to a third-person effect, persuasive press inference relies on an individual reading what is perceived to be the public opinion and basing his or her own opinion on what is perceived to be acceptable.

This perception of public opinion can change the dynamics of the hostile media effect dramatically. “Taken together, the hostile media effect and the persuasive press inference predict that partisans will mistakenly see others’ opinions as increasingly different from their own” (Christen 426 2002). Others found similar results. Findings supported that people try to read public opinion based on their perception of media coverage (Gunther 1998). However, these findings only used participants on low level involvement. When further tested with higher levels of investment, involvement, and engagement the perception of hostile media effect did not influence the participant’s perception of public opinion (Christen 2002).

Instead of hostile media effect influencing the participants in the study, it was the participants who affected each other. The participants enforced their perspective on others (Christen 2002). This is called projection. Projection, an area of sociological study, has shown the importance of perception on social issues (Miller 1982).

Even with this result in Christen’s study, perceptions of media, hostile or not were critical in regards to the effect on individuals in the study.

Findings indicate that partisans rely heavily on their personal opinions when estimating the opinions of others. Only those who are less involved in an issue appear to infer public opinion, at least in part, from their subjective assessments of news content, as predicted by the persuasive press inference (Christen 434 2002).

As in the case with hostile media effect, the level of involvement and engagement

makes the difference. A higher level of involvement and engagement is the critical factor in predicting the effect media coverage will have on the perception of public opinion regarding social issues (Christen 2002).

Media Fragmentation and its Effects

Fox News began the fragmentation of the news media industry in response to what its founder saw as a liberal media system (Coe 2008). The impression that the media had a liberal bias was first expressed by Rupert Murdoch in the early 1980s. Murdoch said media was attempting to alter the United States' political agenda and values (McKnight 2010, 310). Eventually, Murdoch entered into the cable news business with Fox News after witnessing the success of Ted Turner's Cable News Network (CNN).

More cable-based media outlets came into existence over the years, (CNBC, MSNBC, BBC, etc.) became established and the fragmentation continued. The fragmentation didn't just occur in audiences, but also in how media outlets delivered the news and the context they provided in stories.

According to a biannual news consumption survey conducted by the Pew Research Center's People & the Press, 34 percent of respondents said they got news online. This was an increase from 29 percent in 2008 (State of the Media 2011). The amount of respondents who still got their news through print products fell to 31

percent, a decrease from 34 percent in 2008 (State of the Media 2011).

With an increase in competition, including from nontraditional media sources such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, *Colbert Report*, Fox News decided to make their programming distinctly conservative. Fox News also stood firm on long-standing policies regarding their content.

The second distinctive feature of News Corporation is that, as a corporate entity, it holds long-standing policies towards major matters of public interest and it campaigns for those policies. Normally, policies are associated with governments or with organizations in civil society that seek to influence public policy. Most news media organizations normally do something different. They express points of view in editorials on day-to-day matters, and sometimes campaign on them but they do not hold long-term policies as a corporate entity. In the case of News Corporation, it has Policies that are often announced by its CEO and that affects the news and comment it publishes (McKnight 2010, 307).

Additionally, Murdoch sought out gatekeepers and editors who thought like him (McKnight 2010). Fox News also made use of commentaries and specific programs to attack the perceived liberal media bias in their competition such as CNN (McKnight 2010).

The programming decisions of Fox News led to a departure in the traditional role of media for the cable news networks (McKnight 2010). To capture their target demographic audience, each media outlet catered to a specific, niche audience (McKnight 2010). The cable news networks and programs became more explicitly partisan, creating a deep divide between the media outlets and the type of audiences

(McKnight 2010). This strategy has been characterized as a sharp departure from the norm within the news media industry, which was exemplified by objectivity for decades (Tuchman 1972). The 2006 Project for Excellence in Journalism's annual "State of the Media" report revealed cable news programs were becoming even more partisan. The report also claimed cable news media networks were increasing the amount of opinion talk content in comparison to a decrease in actual news content aired (Project for Excellence 2006). Further criticism has been found in other studies.

There appears to be a crisis in broadcast journalism. In quantitative terms there is more than ever before, but the quality has degraded. The once-authoritative nightly news has been fractured, replaced by a variety of programming strategies ranging from the latest version of network news lite to local news happy talk and 24-hour cable news punditry (Baym 2005, 259).

It is thought that the fragmentation of the media environment is a significant contributor to a more visible hostile media effect due to more polarized media outlets and audiences. The Internet has helped to increase the fragmentation by giving the public other sources to get news.

Results showed that opponents of the war perceived the Internet as less aligned with the pro-government position and as more credible than did neutrals or supporters...For the minority partisan group, the diversity of information and views on the war was the main reason for the perception of high credibility of the Internet as a news channel (Choi 2006, 209).

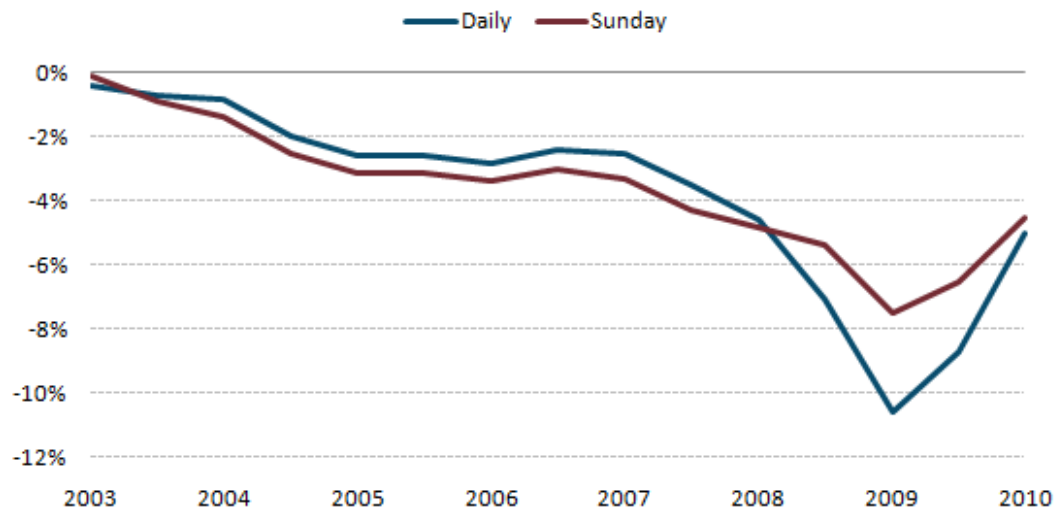
The 2011 State of the Media report illustrates other effects Internet sources have had on the media environment.

The migration to the web also continued to gather speed. In 2010 every news platform saw audiences either stall or decline — except for the web. Cable news, one of the growth sectors of the last decade, is now shrinking, too. For the first time in at least a dozen years, the median audience declined at all three cable news channels (State of Media 2011).

The Internet, as a news medium in general, became the second most popular (State of the Media 2011). Only television news sources still rank ahead of the Internet, but the gap is closing (State of the Media 2011).

The fragmentation, which has hurt newspapers' revenues and circulation may have finally hit rock bottom; the State of the Media report showed a slowing in the decay of circulation and readership of newspapers. This was most likely attributed to the online presence and newspapers getting a boost in online paid subscription services (State of the Media 2011). Figure 2.1, below, illustrates the decline for newspapers over the last seven years with 2009 being the lowest point for newspapers. Since 2009 circulation numbers for newspapers have decreased at a slower rate.

Newspaper Circulation Declines for 15 Consecutive Periods
Percent Declines in Circulation by Six-Month Period



Source: Deutsche Bank Securities and Audit Bureau of Circulations

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM
 2011 STATE OF THE NEWS MEDIA

Fig. 2.1

Other Contributing Components

Uses and gratifications theory, which dates back to Lazarsfeld and Stanton's research in the 1940s, also plays a role in public perception, news consumption, and the selection of news sources. Uses and gratifications facilitates the examination of audience involvement in media consumption.

The media compete with other sources of need satisfaction. The needs served by mass communication constitute but a segment of the wider range of human needs, and the degree to which they can be adequately met through mass media consumption certainly varies (Katz 1974, 511).

The needs of each individual are different and unique. However, there are multiple ways for media outlets to meet the different needs of individuals (Gerber 2010, Ostertag 2010). Previous research has shown audience gratifications come from at least three sources: media content, exposure to the media, and what happens when an individual is exposed to different media (Katz 1974).

The inclusion of personality traits filled some gaps in the uses and gratifications theory. Eight reoccurring traits were identified as influencing television view habits. (Rubin 1985) Those eight motives were relaxation, entertainment, social interaction, companionship, passing time, escape, viewing by habit, and arousal (Rubin 1985). These influences may correlate best to entertainment television programming rather than news programming. However, entertainment remains important to attracting audiences. Evidence supports that personality factors have influence on consumption of different programming genres (Bagdasarov 2010).

Uses and gratifications theory has also been applied to study other facets of media outlets. The most current trend of uses and gratifications research has been with social media. The focus of the research has emphasized how to utilize social media to increase audiences, engaging existing audiences and social media's role the 24-hour news cycle.

Gatekeeping

Another ancillary theory that may have an impact on the media environment is gatekeeping. David Manning White applied gatekeeping to communications studies in 1950. Gatekeeping suggests an entity filters information into small enough pieces so it can be consumed (Shoemaker and Vos 2008). There are many filters that act as gatekeepers before the information is ever disseminated to the public. The first filter is the source of the news itself (Ostgaard 1965). The journalist then filters that information into a story. The story goes through editors who filter the information before it is disseminated to the public (Ostgaard 1965).

Information must be filtered to make it simpler for an audience to understand (Ostgaard 1965). Other factors include newsworthiness elements such as timeliness, identification, and proximity (Bridges 1989). A content analysis in 1989 of 101 daily newspapers' front pages helped to establish specific news elements critical to media consumption. Timeliness, prominence, proximity, impact, magnitude and conflict were determined to be significant elements in what was selected as front-page news (Bridges 1989). These elements would be expanded upon from a public relations approach to include human interest, cultural proximity and unexpected news (Supa and Zoch 2009). This expansion made a couple more areas for categorization, but also concisely fit every type of story into a category.

However, Ostgaard suggests the media will reinforce the current state—the status quo— and sensationalize stories (Ostgaard 1965).

A contrast of war coverage from the Vietnam and second Gulf War (known as Operation Iraqi Freedom) is an example of gatekeeping from the government.

During the Vietnam War, media had the freedom to go where they wanted to cover the war. In 2003, the media environment was much different.

Network television was the dominant medium during the Vietnam War. Television reports used edited film, but from uncontrolled reporting sources. They showed very graphically what was happening on the ground...In part for this reason, media coverage was effective in eventually convincing the public that the war was not going well despite official government pronouncements...In the 2003 Iraq War, saturation coverage appeared to be unedited and happening in real time...In actuality, embedded journalists were very closely controlled in their access to events. Unlike in Vietnam, they had no freedom to go where the action was and their position was in fact a form of editing or gatekeeping (Choi 2006, 210).

Bernard Goldberg, a former contributor to CBS Nightly News, gave multiple examples of the media bias and framing. In his 2002 book, Goldberg claimed *60 Minutes* failed the general public. The program presented presidential candidate Steve Forbes' flat tax proposal as a "wacky idea." CBS presented the issue from only one side, using experts against the flat tax (Goldberg 2002). This framing ignored the conservative view and the potential benefits Goldberg wrote a column on this occurrence and was disciplined by CBS for speaking out against the decisions made (Goldberg 2002). This framing of the flat tax issue also serves as an example of hostile media effect in action. The less conservative-minded people, who supported

the flat tax, saw the coverage as negative and against their perspective.

Another illustration of media bias, according to Goldberg, was in how the media covered Congressional hearings, votes, or even the State of the Union Address (Goldberg 2002). Goldberg pointed out news personalities identified the conservative members of Congress by inserting the word “conservative” in front of their name. This resulted in introductory clauses such as “conservative Senator from Texas.” Oppositely, the same media personalities introduced Democrat members of Congress as “a Senator from Illinois” (Goldberg 2002).

A second look at David Manning White’s 1950 study on gatekeeping revealed selections of photographs for publication were more subjective decisions for individuals (Bissell 2000). Decisions made by a group of editors differed. The increase in chain of command can contribute to an increased likelihood of the alteration or distorting of reality (Bissell 2000).

Hostile Media Effect

As a result of the severe fragmentation of the news media industry the importance of hostile media effects research is critical in understanding perceptions and the effect perceptions have on credibility of a particular news outlet. “The current cable news environment is one in which audience members’ partisan perspectives and the increasingly obvious partisan positions of certain news

sources are likely to interact to shape how viewers perceive news content” (Coe 2008, 205). This means people will seek out the news outlets that reinforce their perspectives rather than those that contradict their views. Coe’s study found liberal-minded respondents saw more media bias in Fox News, a conservative bias, and conservative-minded respondents saw more bias, a liberal media bias, in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. At the same time, both groups saw more media bias in *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* than in other news programs (Coe 2008).

Hostile media effect research revealed that even in the satiric and humor based programs such as *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report*, the conservative-minded found more bias (Arpan 2009). The conservative minded saw more bias toward all candidates and issues aired on the programs than those who were more liberal-minded (Arpan 2009).

With the increase in news media fragmentation there is value in expanding hostile media effect knowledge. It is important to understand the dynamics between various media outlets and the audiences. Additionally, it is important to understand elements utilized by the different media outlets to engage the audiences and what keeps an audience consuming content from a specific outlet. To better understand the relationship between media and audiences this research examines the following

research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

R1: What are the media consumption habits and perceptions of the undergraduate student population?

R2: Does perception of bias, particularly from an opposing perspective, effect news consumption?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Methodology

An online survey was conducted with a convenience sample, the undergraduate population of Ball State University. The population was chosen because of its size and accessibility for participation in the study. Participation was on a voluntary basis. Respondents were recruited via email using the university's communication center. The communication center sent out the email and link to survey to the undergraduate student population. Even with a large population such as Ball State's 16,400 undergraduate student population (BSU Fact book), a low participation and response rate was expected. The survey is available as Appendix A.

Survey Monkey, an Internet software and questionnaire tool, was the survey platform chosen in this study. Survey Monkey was chosen for its user-friendly design and low-cost monthly fee. The monthly fee was the only cost in materials for

the survey. When respondents clicked on the link provided to them in the recruitment email they were presented with a questionnaire.

The survey asked questions regarding respondent's perceptions of media outlets and news consumption. Questions began with a national scope before being narrowed to the hyper local level. The hyper local scope was included in the study because previous studies of this nature have not included collegiate news sources.

Some questions in the survey could be answered by selecting more than one option. Other questions could only have one response selected. No write-in option was given. The second half of the survey included a seven-point Likert scale.

Respondents were asked to rate how important specific items were to their news consumption habits. The final three questions of the survey gathered demographic information. Respondents could skip any question. There was also a choose not to respond option for some questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Results

A total of 139 respondents (N= 139) participated in this study by answering questions regarding their perceptions and media consumption habits. The response rate was very low at only one percent of the undergraduate student population. The results showed respondents' perceptions of local media sources, what is important to their media consumption habits, and how often they consume media.

Nearly half (n=68, 48 percent) of the respondents said they sought out news every day with 27 percent (n=38) who sought out news a couple times a week. Less than 10 percent of respondents (n=7) indicated they never sought out news. Figure 4.1 illustrates the breakdown of news consumption habits of the respondents.

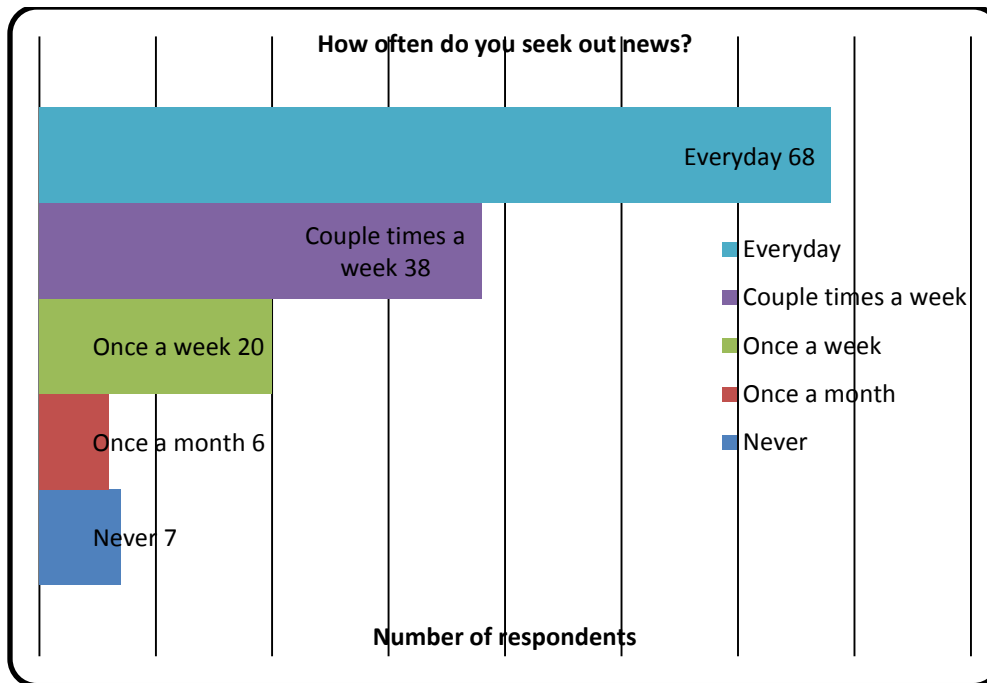


Fig. 4.1

A high number of respondents (n=93, 75 percent) indicated that keeping up to date with news is important to them. Of the 93 respondents, 32 percent (n=40), said it was very important to be kept up to date on news.

The Internet was the most popular news source for respondents to get news.

The Internet served as a news source for 95 percent of respondents (n=132).

Television received the second most responses with 76 percent of respondents (n=106). Newspapers next with 69 percent of respondents (n=96).

Radio and magazines were the final two media sources and finished with 44 percent (n=62) and 31 percent (n=44).

One local news source, *The Ball State Daily News*, was the overwhelming favorite of respondents with 88 percent (n=111). WLBC, a radio station, was selected by 34 percent of respondents (n=43). *The Muncie Star Press* and *The Indianapolis Star* were used by 28 percent (n=36) and 24 percent (n=31) of respondents.

Respondents were most likely to use the local sources a couple times a week to receive news (n=48). The same amount of respondents said they used local sources to get news for two options, every day and once a week (n=28). Figure 4.2 illustrates the split among respondents on how often they consumed local media with a couple times a week being the most popular response.

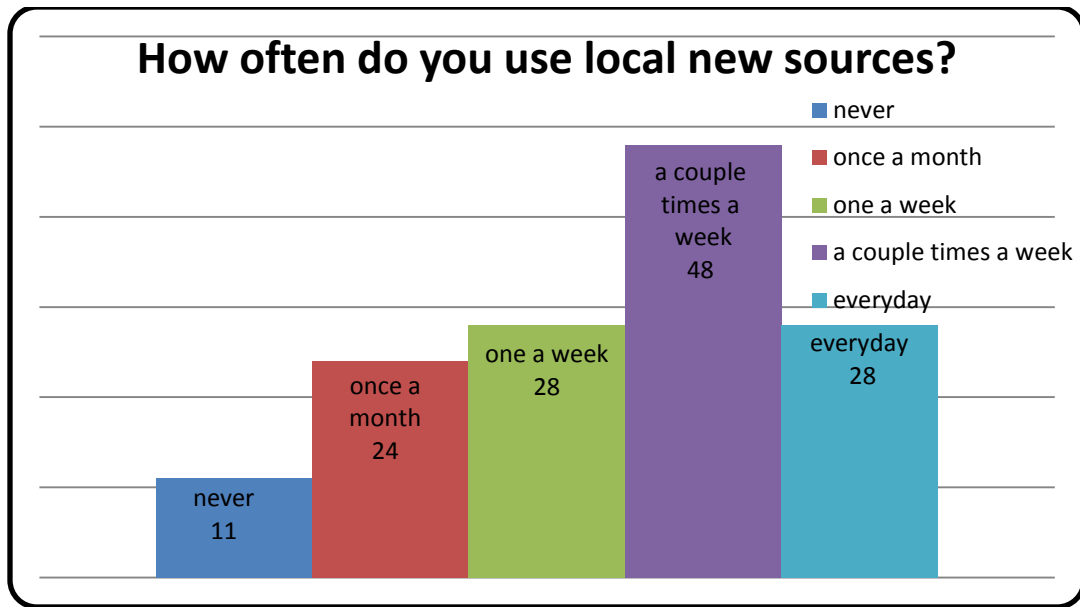


Fig. 4.2

The Indianapolis Star was perceived to be the most trustworthy (n=60, 48 percent), credible (n=71, 55 percent), and accurate local news outlet (n=72, 55 percent). Respondents had various perceptions about the other local media sources with regard to being trustworthiness, credibility and accuracy. *The Ball State Daily News* was second in trustworthiness (n=25, 18 percent), but third in credibility (n=18, 14 percent) and tied for third in accuracy (n=14, 10 percent). IPR was perceived to be the second most credible (n=20, 15 percent) and accurate by respondents (n=22, 17 percent). Figures 4.3-4.5 shows the perceived trustworthiness, credibility and accuracy of the local media outlets.

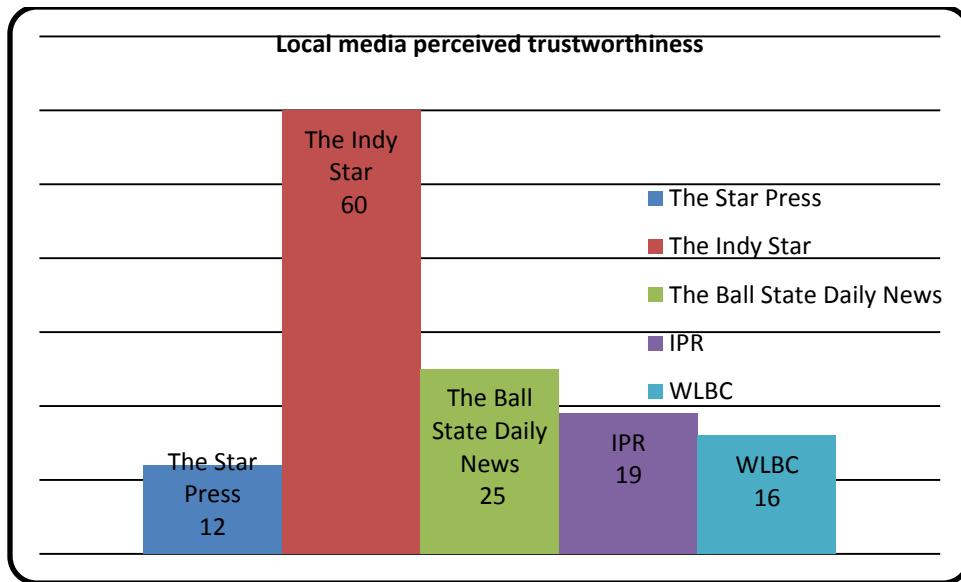


Fig. 4.3

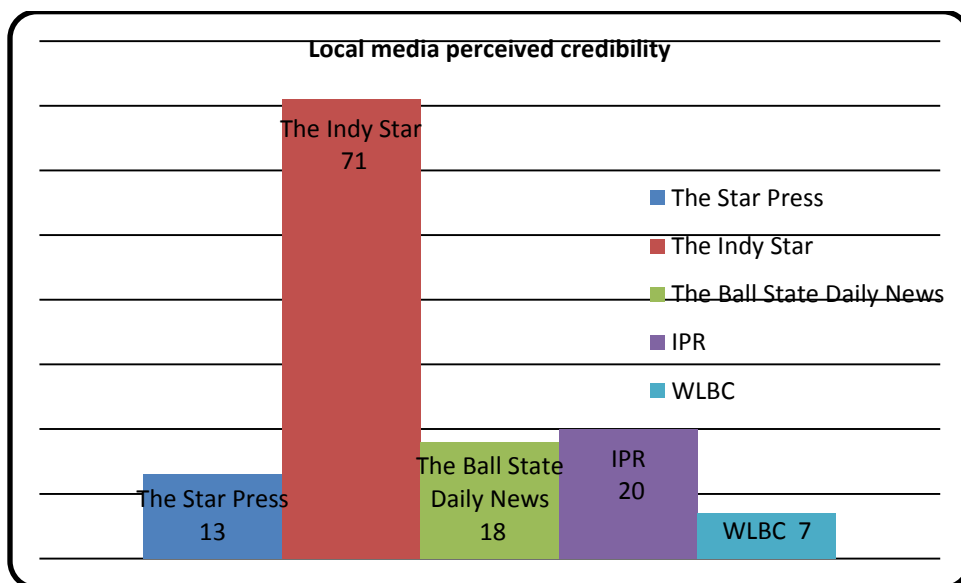


Fig. 4.4

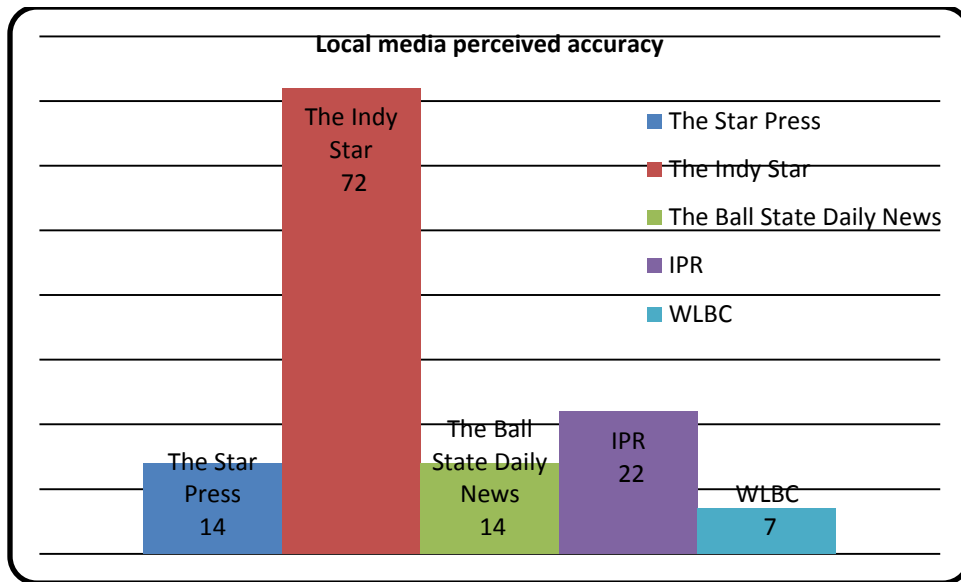


Fig. 4.5

Only 32 percent of respondents (n=39) perceived newspapers on a national scope of having a liberal bias. The rest of the media outlets were perceived to have a liberal media bias more often. Internet new sources were perceived as liberal by 66 percent of respondents (n=81). Television was second with 64 percent of respondents (n=79) while magazines (n=59, 48 percent) and radio (n=58, 47 percent) ranked ahead of newspapers.

Respondents perceived television news sources as having a liberal bias at nearly the same rate as they perceived television news sources as having a conservative bias. Television (n=77, 64 percent) and newspapers (n=69, 58 percent)

were the two highest in perception of a conservative bias. Respondents also perceived a conservative bias in radio news sources. Radio was perceived with a conservative media bias by 57 percent of respondents (n=68) while 30 percent (n=36) perceived a conservative bias in Internet news sources. Magazines had the lowest perceived conservative bias at 23 percent (n=28).

All media sources were similarly perceived as having a moderate position. The same amount of respondents (n=40, 35 percent) perceived television and magazine news sources as having a moderate position. Newspapers were the most perceived moderate position news source with 46 percent (n=52) of respondents perceiving a moderate position. Internet news sources (n=46, 41 percent) and radio news sources (n=44, 39 percent) were also nearly identical in moderate position perception by respondents. Figure 4.6 illustrates the general perceptions of media bias indicated by respondents.

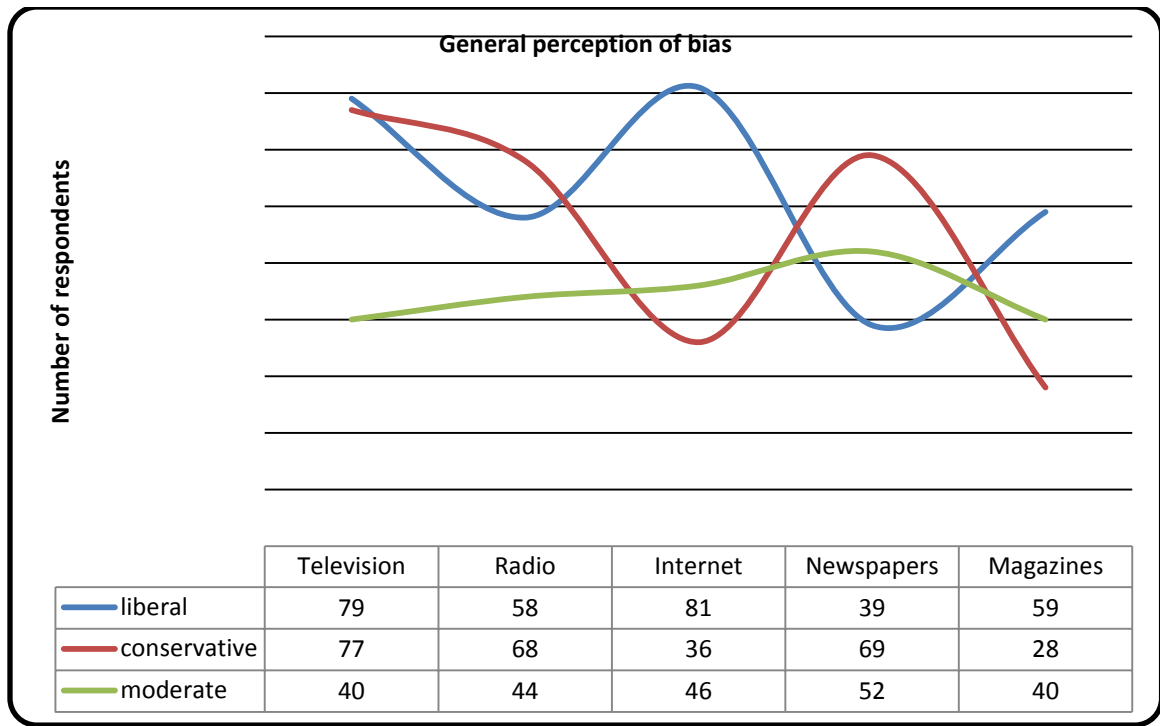


Fig. 4.6

Most respondents (n=67, 72 percent) perceived *The Ball State Daily News* as having a liberal bias. Only 10 percent of respondents (n=8) viewed *The Ball State Daily News* as having a conservative bias. *The Indianapolis Star* and *The Muncie Star Press* were the next highest with a conservative media bias. *The Indianapolis Star* was perceived as having a liberal bias by 28 percent of respondents (n=26) while *The Muncie Star Press* (n=20) was perceived to have a liberal bias by 21 percent of respondents.

The Muncie Star Press was the local news source most perceived as having a

conservative bias. More than half of the respondents (n=43, 53 percent) perceived *The Muncie Star Press* as having a conservative bias. *The Indianapolis Star* was the second most perceived with a conservative bias with 35 percent of respondents (n=28). WLBC was third with 32 percent of respondents (n=26) indicating a conservative bias.

As was the case with perceptions of media outlets in general, local media outlets were clustered together in being perceived as holding a moderate position. WLBC was perceived the most moderate with 40 percent of respondents (n=36). The rest of the local news sources were all within 10 percent of WLBC. *The Ball State Daily News* was perceived as moderate by 39 percent (n=35). IPR and *The Indianapolis Star* were next with 34 percent (n=31) and 33 percent (n=30). *The Muncie Star Press* was least perceived as a moderate position outlet with 30 percent (n=27) of respondents indicating a moderate position. Figure 4.7 illustrates the general perception of bias in media outlets by respondents.

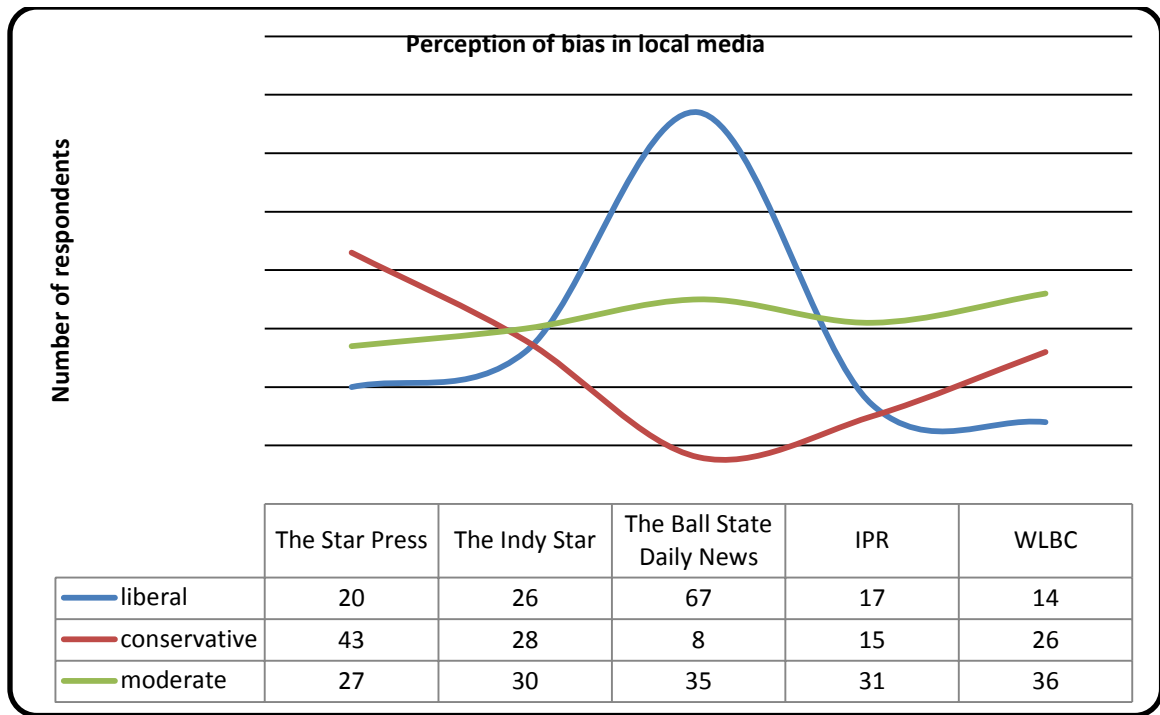


Fig. 4.7

Respondents' ideology was also split with the moderate and liberal perspectives being nearly identical. The liberal perspective was selected the most often with 35 percent of respondents (n=43); 32 percent (n=40) of respondents indicated they were moderate in perspective. Conservative respondents (n=26) made up 21 percent of responses while 10 percent chose not to respond (n=13). The conservative perspective was the most frequent response to which perspective respondents saw as opposite from their own (n=59, 48 percent). The liberal perspective was seen as the opposite by 30 percent (n=37) of respondents while

3 percent (n=4) said the moderate perspective was opposite to theirs. A large quantity of respondents (n=21, 17 percent) chose not to respond.

The perception of trustworthiness, credibility, and accuracy were very important to respondents. On a Likert-scale from 1 to 7, respondents were asked to rate how important trustworthiness (n=67, 55 percent), credibility (n=68, 56 percent) and accuracy (n=66, 53 percent) was. Each garnered a 7 rating by the majority of respondents. Nearly 80 percent of respondents rated each with at least a 6. Figure 4.8 shows the importance of the perception of accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness to respondents.

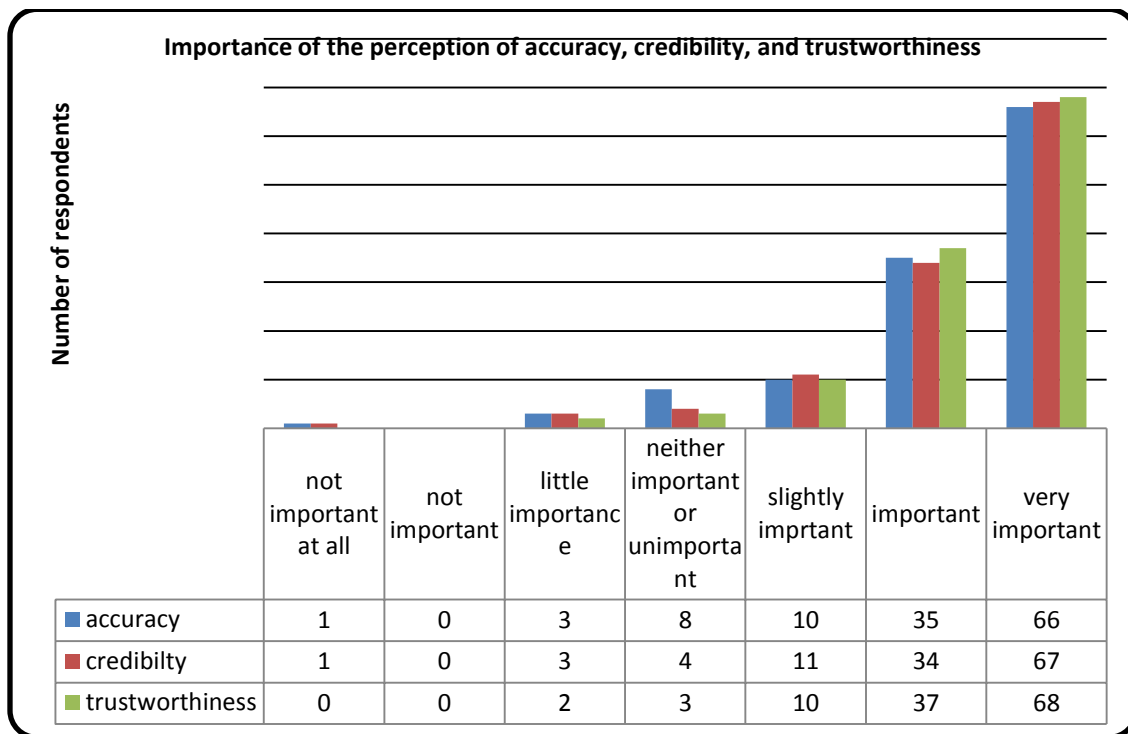


Fig. 4.8

Respondents were also asked to rate how important different elements of news were to their news consumption habits. Responses varied on the importance of breaking news to respondents' consumption habits. Only 26 percent (n=32) said breaking news was very important. In all, 71 percent of respondents (n=88) indicated breaking news played at least some significance in their news consumption habits.

Human-interest stories also were important to respondents. Most respondents, 72 percent (n=88), said human interest stories were important. Of the 88 respondents that said human-interest stories were important to their news consumption habits, 34 percent (n=42) said human-interest stories were only slightly important.

Investigative stories held less interest. According to 67 percent of respondents (n=82), investigative stories are important to their news consumption habits. However, of the 82 respondents that said investigative stories were important, 30 percent (n=37) rated investigative stories as only slightly important.

Having an expert providing analysis and insight to news stories was important, however. The majority of respondents (n=80, 66 percent) said it was important to have experts as part of their news consumption.

In contrast to hostile media effect, 68 percent of respondents (n=82) said it was important to their news consumption habits to include differing viewpoints represented. 30 percent of respondents (n= 37) said that having a news source agreeable to their political party affiliation was neither important nor important.

Demographically, respondents were in the majority female. In all, 72 percent of respondents (n=88) were female. Males only comprised 27 percent of respondents (n=33). This gender ratio was not representative of the undergraduate population of Ball State in which females are 52 percent of the population (Fact Book 2011). Nearly 66 percent (n=73) of respondents were 21 years of age or older. The white, non-Hispanic or Latino ethnicity was the largest group of respondents, totaling 88 percent (n=107).

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Understanding the effects of perception on media outlets and news consumption is important on both the micro and macro level. Knowing what the perceptions are and what kind of effect they have can help media to provide content the public wants and needs. Even though national and local news have different focuses in the type of content they provide, they share some similarities. Some of those similarities are the perception of a liberal media bias, the popularity of the Internet as a credible news source, the existence of media fragmentation, and the potential for hostile media effect to exist. Differences include the perception of sources having either a conservative or moderate bias, what may be a hostile source, and how often media is consumed.

This study helped highlight the perceptions of a specific audience, factors in news consumption along with the importance of credibility, accuracy, and

trustworthiness. In addition, this study raised questions regarding whether hostile media effect is as strong with an audience that grew up with a fragmented media environment and is used to multiple perspectives.

This study found the undergraduate student population of Ball State University used a variety of sources and mediums to get news. The Internet, as a medium, was the most popular source and could be considered the primary source of the respondents. The student newspaper, *The Ball State Daily News*, was also indicated as an important source for students to get news. Respondents indicated they sought out news through multiple mediums and sources. Television and newspaper sources were used in addition to the Internet by respondents who sought out news.

Respondents indicated the importance of being informed. Nearly half of the respondents said they consumed news as part of their daily routine. The Internet may have been the most popular source among respondents for consumption of national news, but *The Ball State Daily News* was the most popular among hyper local sources.

There are multiple reasons for this, particularly the ease of access and the low cost. *The Ball State Daily News* is free while the print editions of other local

newspapers such as *The Muncie Star Press* or *The Indianapolis Star* are not free. Despite this, the web presence of the other news, *The Muncie Star Press* and *The Indianapolis Star*, sources are free. Respondents still used *The Ball State Daily News* more.

Additional factors also played a role in sources respondents chose to consume. Respondents indicated that breaking news was the most important element. Human interest stories were also important to respondents. Hyper local media such as *The Ball State Daily News*, *The Muncie Star Press*, and *The Indianapolis Star* are able to focus on breaking local news and human interest stories. Consequently, the hyper local content is more likely to meet the interests of the people than national news sources. This is because of journalistic elements such as proximity (Bridges 1989, Supa and Zoch 2009). However, more often than elements of journalism, something else plays a more significant role: perceptions.

Respondents confirmed previous research in regards to the importance of the perception of accuracy, credibility, and trustworthiness (Thorson 2010, Price 2010, et al). The respondents said the perception of trustworthiness, accuracy, and credibility were factors in their decision to use a specific media source.

The Indianapolis Star was perceived to be the most credible (n=71, 55

percent), accurate (n=72, 55 percent), and trustworthy (n=60, 45 percent) among the hyper local sources involved in this study. Respondents indicated this overwhelmingly. No other local source received more than 25 responses. *The Indianapolis Star* was the media source the farthest distance away from the respondents. At the same time, *The Ball State Daily News* had a lower perception of credibility, accuracy and trustworthiness. *The Ball State Daily News* was among the closest distance-wise for respondents.

With those results in mind a question remains: Why would respondents who don't use *The Indianapolis Star* perceive it to be the most trustworthy, credible, and accurate local news source? There are multiple factors that likely affect *The Indianapolis Star* in a negative manner for media consumption. It is likely that the distance from the respondents plays a role. With other media sources (ie *The Muncie Star Press*, *The Ball State Daily News*, IPR, and WLBC) closer, respondents have multiple options to choose from. The price of subscription also plays a role. Respondents are not likely to pay subscription fees to multiple sources when they can access content via the Internet for free. *The Indianapolis Star* is also less likely to cover news of interest to the respondents being the farthest source from the city of Muncie.

Popular perception is that there is a liberal media bias (Goldberg 2002, Domke 1999). The perception of bias was a difficult one for respondents to distinguish. They had trouble separating the news sources. Respondents even contradicted their perceptions indicating television and Internet news sources were the most likely to have a liberal bias. Respondents perceived television, radio, and newspaper as the most likely sources to have a conservative bias.

Internet and magazine sources were the sources least perceived to have a conservative bias. Further confirming the difficulty to distinguish bias, respondents' perceived television, radio, newspaper, magazine and Internet sources as having a moderate position. A likely reason for this inability to distinguish was the lack of a definition of what liberal, conservative, and moderate was for the purpose of the study. Another possibility for this problem could be media literacy. Perhaps the respondents did not know what bias was.

Respondents had an easier time distinguishing perceived bias in local news sources. A majority perceived *The Ball State Daily News* as having a liberal bias and *The Muncie Star Press* as having a conservative bias. Even with those two strong distinctions, respondents had difficulty again with a moderate bias. All the local news sources were perceived about the same in regards to having a moderate

position.

The desire for differing perspectives in news consumption habits was one of the key findings in this study. This finding goes against the research that supported hostile media effect. Hostile media effect (Vallone, Ross, Leper 1985) stated that an individual with a perspective or on one side of an issue will view media as hostile to their cause, even if a story is presented objectively without bias (Gunther 1986). It is further said that hostile media effect becomes stronger when one becomes actively engaged (Gunther 1992). However, once a media source becomes hostile, an individual is less likely to use that source for their news (Vallone, Ross, Leper 1985).

The respondents of this study contradict hostile media effect, but this isn't the only instance of this contradiction. There is a debate in regard to hostile media effect. Others have disagreed with research indicating hostile media effect's existence, citing inconsistencies in evaluations of the media (Choi 2006, Eveland 2000). Respondents supported this on the hyper local scale. They indicated it was neither important nor unimportant to have a news source agreeable to their perspectives—particularly along political party lines. In fact, respondents indicated that it was important to have differing viewpoints represented in their news consumption habits. *Could this be a result from the population having grown up in a*

fragmented media environment and being used to multiple viewpoints being represented?

The fragmented media environment could be the reason for the interest in receiving news from multiple perspectives. Perhaps, as being college students, respondents have to consume multiple perspectives of news for classes.

However, no matter the reason, there must be some level of interest and engagement for an individual to be actively consuming multiple perspectives on a regular basis. To get all the possible information on a story would require people to actively seek out multiple media outlets with differing stories. This would provide people with different viewpoints in their media consumption habits. It is unknown if undergraduate students would actively search for multiple perspectives on a regular basis.

Another potential answer lies in the top news headlines selected by news generators such as Google news, Yahoo, AOL, and MSN. Computer algorithms are said to select the stories selected as the top news stories posted on the news services websites. It is possible these algorithms select a variety of perspectives in addition to stories. This would decrease the effort needed in actively seeking out multiple perspectives. It is possible that this type of decrease in effort provided by

news services such as Google news assist in offering the public differing perspectives in one place. These potential answers should be explored in further research along with other angles in regards to the result of audiences growing up with a fragmented media environment.

Conclusion

Perceptions play an important role in decisions people make about media consumption and if they will use a media source (Christie 2006, Choi 2006, Coe 2008, Gerber 2009, Eveland 2000). This study found that the perception of credibility, accuracy and trustworthiness all play an important role in decisions regarding which source to use as well as how often to consume news.

As important as credibility, accuracy and trustworthiness are, they are not all the elements that factor into a decision to consume or not for population such as the undergraduate students at Ball State. Other factors include the type of medium, convenience, and experts providing insight or analysis to break the news down. For the undergraduate population it was apparent that convenience was a heavy influence on what media outlets to use for news consumption. With 88 percent of

respondents choosing *The Ball State Daily News* as a news source the ease of access made it convenient for selection and consumption. Respondents also didn't have to spend any money or go searching for copies since the distribution areas are fixed.

The Internet was the most popular medium for respondents to get their news. This supported the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism State of the Media 2011 report that found the Internet as one of the most popular mediums for adults. "For the first time, too, more people said they got news from the web than newspapers. The Internet now trails only television among American adults as a destination for news, and the trend line shows the gap closing" (State of the Media 2011).

This study found little support for the hostile media effect among college students. While many (Gunther 1992, Vallone, Ross, Leper 1985, et al) argue that hostile media effect will discourage consumers to continue usage of a hostile news source this study found respondents welcomed differing viewpoints. Respondents also demonstrated an inability to distinguish a bias among local news outlets, providing inconsistencies.

There were many limitations to this study. No incentive was promoted or given in the recruitment of respondents. As a result, the response rate was very low.

The results of the study may not be representative of the entire student population of Ball State. The limitation to using an online survey allows potential participants to easily opt out instead of conducting research with paper surveys and distributing them to students in classes. An example of this comes from the demographics of the respondents. The percentage of females that participated in the study was 72 percent (n=88) which is more than the female to male ratio at Ball State (BSU Fact book). There is a 52 to 48 percent female to male ratio at Ball State. A researcher is at the mercy of the potential respondent's willingness to participate in the study by completing the survey. This study was also limited in the types of questions that could be answered. The survey was designed to be limited as to establish a baseline for future research due. The small response rate makes it difficult to compare to national data, but establishes a baseline to do so in the future. The lack of definitions for terms such as conservative, liberal, and moderate were also troublesome in the survey. Respondents had a difficult time identifying news sources as conservative, liberal or moderate. A clear definition may have prevented confusion and given different results.

Future research should focus on expanding the amount of respondents to compare to national scope studies conducted by the Pew Research Center. In

addition, special attention should be given to why the respondents sought out news with differing perspectives and how they sought out the multiple perspectives. This should be done both with an undergraduate population as well as a regional population. Having multiple groups that are of different age, background, and location may bring to light similarities or differences highlighted in the national research conducted by Pew. It will also make for comparisons between age groups and other possible demographic divisions such as race, gender, political affiliation, and how active respondents are in news consumption. Exploring the differences or similarities of national perception and media consumption to a local or regional scale may lead to further inquiries into the presentation of news to the public.

Additional research can also follow an experimental route to see if participants choose to use another source when one they perceive to be accurate, credible, and trustworthy makes numerous errors in what they report. The hostile media effect could also be explored in this as well to see participants' reactions when a news source they had trusted and relied on shifts its stance on an issue or political opinion. The experiment could further be broken down into a short-term and long-term version to explore the effects on news consumption when perception doesn't meet the reality a participant is faced with.

Findings from this study illustrate perceptions, whatever they may be, are critical influences in decision making about media outlets and news consumption. The more an individual or public perceives a media outlet to be credible, accurate, or trustworthy the more likely it will be that they will continue to use the media outlet. However, convenience, perceptions of bias, and elements of journalism also play a role in decisions people make about news consumption and media outlets. Consequently, this study learned which local news sources are the most popular, what the general perceptions of mediums are, the perceptions of local media outlets, the importance of these perceptions in the decisions they influence as well as what journalistic elements are desired by the respondents in their news consumption.

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Appendix A

Thank you for participating in this survey. The purpose of this survey is to examine the relationship between news sources and audiences. Please answer questions the best of your ability. The survey is short and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

You may stop at any time. By completing this survey you are giving your consent that answers will be included in the study data. All data from this research project will maintained as confidential. There will be no means of identifying participants.

If you have any questions regarding this survey please contact the principal investigator Daniel Sipocz, a graduate student in the Department of Journalism at dsipocz@bsu.edu. You can also contact the faculty advisor Dr. Dustin Supa, Assistant Professor of the Department of Journalism at dwsupa@bsu.edu.

Please select the answer or answers that best fit your media consumption habits and beliefs about media sources.

Section 1 is comprised of 15 questions seeking to learn about your media consumption preferences, habits, and beliefs

1. How often do you seek out news?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A couple times a week
- ☐ Everyday

2. Choose all that apply.

What sources do you get your news from?

- ☐ Television
- ☐ Radio
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Newspapers
- ☐ Magazines
- ☐ None of the above

3. Choose all that apply.

What local sources do you get your news from?

- ☐ The Muncie Star Press
- ☐ The Indianapolis Star
- ☐ The Ball State Daily News
- ☐ IPR
- ☐ WLBC

4. How often do you use local sources to get your news?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Once a week
- ☐ A couple times a week
- ☐ Everyday

5. What local source do you perceive to be the most trustworthy?

- ☐ The Muncie Star Press
- ☐ The Indianapolis Star
- ☐ The Ball State Daily News
- ☐ IPR
- ☐ WLBC

6. What local source do you perceive as most credible?

- ☐ The Muncie Star Press
- ☐ The Indianapolis Star
- ☐ The Ball State Daily News
- ☐ IPR
- ☐ WLBC

7. What local source do you perceive as most accurate?

- ☐ The Muncie Star Press
- ☐ The Indianapolis Star
- ☐ The Ball State Daily News
- ☐ IPR
- ☐ WLBC

8. Choose all that apply.

What sources do you perceive to have a liberal bias?



Television



Radio



Internet



Newspapers



Magazines

9. Choose all that apply.

What sources do you perceive to have a conservative bias?



Television



Radio



Internet



Newspapers



Magazines

10. Choose all that apply.

What sources do you perceive to have a moderate position?



Television



Radio



Internet



Newspapers



Magazines

11. Choose all that apply.

What local sources do you perceive to have a liberal bias?



The Star Press

- ☒ The Indy Star
- ☒ The Ball State Daily News
- ☒ IPR
- ☒ WLBC

12. Choose all that apply.

What local sources do you perceive to have a conservative bias?

- ☒ The Muncie Star Press
- ☒ The Indianapolis Star
- ☒ The Ball State Daily News
- ☒ IPR
- ☒ WLBC

13. Choose all that apply.

What local sources do you perceive to have a moderate position?

- ☒ The Muncie Star Press
- ☒ The Indianapolis Star
- ☒ The Ball State Daily News
- ☒ IPR
- ☒ WLBC

14. What ideology do you identify with closest?

- ☒ Liberal
- ☒ Conservative
- ☒ Moderate
- ☒ Choose not to respond

15. What ideology is opposite to the one you identify closest with?

- ☐ Liberal
☐ Conservative
☐ Moderate
☐ Choose not to answer

Please indicate how important the following statements are to your media consumption. A 1 indicates not important while a 7 indicates very important.

- 1 Not important at all
2 Not important
3 Little importance
4 Neither unimportant nor important
5 Slightly important
6 Important
7 Very important

1. How important is it to you to be kept up to date with news?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 ☐6 ☐7

2. How important is breaking news to your news consumption habits?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 ☐6 ☐7

3. How important is human interest stories to your news consumption habits?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 ☐6 ☐7

4. How important are stories of investigative nature to your news consumption habits?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 ☐6 ☐7

5. How important is your perception of accuracy in a news source?

- ☐1 ☐2 ☐3 ☐4 ☐5 ☐6 ☐7

Please indicate how important the following statements are to your media consumption. A 1 indicates not important while a 7 indicates very important.

- 1 Not important at all
- 2 Not important
- 3 Little importance
- 4 Neither unimportant nor important
- 5 Slightly important
- 6 Important
- 7 Very important

1. How important is your perception of credibility in a news source?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

2. How important is your perception of trustworthiness in a news source?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

3. How important is agreeableness of a news source to your political party affiliation?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

4. How important is having a traditional news broadcast to your news consumption habits?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

5. How important is having experts providing analysis and insight on stories to your media consumption habits?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

6. How important is it to your news consumption habits to have differing viewpoints represented?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7

1. What gender do you identify with?

- ☐ What gender do you identify with? Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Choose not to answer

2. How old are you?

- ☐ 18
- ☐ 19
- ☐ 20
- ☐ 21
- ☐ 22
- ☐ 23

3. Please specify your ethnicity for demographic information only.

- ☐ Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ White, Non-Hispanic or Latino
- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian
- ☐ No response